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National Literacy Secretariat



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National
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Le Secrétariat
national à
l'alphabétisation

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SDL-010-10-96

Literacy is more than basic reading, writing and arithmetic. Literacy today includes critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed at work, at home and in the community.

Statistics show that 22 per cent of Canadians have difficulty reading commonly-available material. Another 26 per cent have limited reading skills. They read, but do not read well.

People with weak literacy skills can be found in every community – it is not an issue that has social, political, cultural or economic boundaries.

The importance of literacy

Literacy concerns everyone, regardless of age, education or occupation. It is at the heart of our ability to be involved in the social, cultural, economic and political life of our communities and our country.

The role of the National Literacy Secretariat

The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) was formed in 1988 as a national response to a national issue. The NLS has been working to ensure Canadians have opportunities to develop the ever-expanding literacy skills needed to manage in everyday life. It encourages partners throughout Canada to invest in literacy.

The NLS's role is to support work which:

- develops learning materials;
- improves access to literacy programs for all Canadians in every region of the country;
- increases public awareness of the importance of literacy;
- improves coordination and information sharing among the many partners on literacy; and
- advances literacy research.

We need to talk about people's "literacy needs" not their "literacy levels".

Literacy skills need practice throughout life.

Literacy skills are important for developing and maintaining marketable work skills, staying healthy and participating in all aspects of life.

The importance of partnerships

The NLS recognizes there are many players involved in expanding the literacy skills of Canadians. A wide-ranging network of partnerships has evolved which includes all provincial and territorial governments, the voluntary sector, business and labour, the literacy community and federal government departments.

The NLS encourages and supports these literacy partnerships in a number of ways. Nationally, the NLS supports partners by sharing

expertise and literacy research. The NLS also plays a role **federally** in policy, research and developmental projects.

Literacy projects with national **voluntary organizations** help these groups work on literacy issues facing their members. Other efforts help professional associations promote awareness of literacy issues. They also remind organizations to keep the varying literacy skills of their clients in mind when designing programs and services.

To support **provincial/territorial government** literacy activities, the NLS funds are directed to regional or local needs. For example, some projects help to train tutors using distance education and technology. Other projects focus on the development of learning materials, from traditional curriculum to leading-edge technology. Family literacy projects help to pass on good literacy practices and encourage reading at home. Still other projects reach out to disadvantaged Canadians so they too can benefit from community-based literacy programming.

The NLS also works with **business and labour** to meet the literacy needs of Canadian workers. Partnerships with business and labour promote literacy practice in the workplace. The NLS has encouraged non-traditional learning in the workplace and elsewhere so that Canadian workers have access to the training they need to keep their skills competitive.

Literacy organizations receive NLS funding to ensure a strong Canada-wide literacy network. Through support to national, provincial/territorial and local literacy organizations, the NLS ensures there is coordination and planning across the country; that literacy practitioners are trained; and that literacy learners have the support they need.

The NLS also works with **international organizations** like the OECD and with countries such as the United Kingdom, France and the U.S. to share information and knowledge about literacy practices. Canada is recognized as a leader on the issue of literacy because of our pioneering efforts to redefine literacy to include a range of competencies and skills.

Literacy and learning are inseparable

Literacy skills need regular practice. And that means an **individual** commitment to lifelong learning. The NLS works to maintain a strong literacy network so that **all Canadians** can maintain and continue to improve their literacy skills.

For additional information on literacy, please contact:

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